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ABSTRACT

Six division chairpersons at Central Virginia Community College participated in a study designed to develop a problem situation set which can be used to examine academic managers' preferred decision processes; to identify the existing preferred decision processes of chairpersons within the community college setting; and to ascertain how problem situation attributes influence chairpersons' willingness to share the decision process with subordinates. The study participants responded to a 30-item problem situation set, some of which critically involved subordinates in the decision-making process. Subordinate cooperation was less crucial in other problems. Regardless of the problem attributes, chairpersons preferred involving subordinates in problem-solving. They chose decision processes that required subordinate input in about 80% of the problem situations, 63% in consultative style and 17% where chairpersons were willing to adopt and implement any solutions that had support of the entire group. It was shown feasible to develop a set of problem situations which can be used in future studies to examine community college chairpersons' decision-making behaviors. (IR)

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DECISION PROCESSES PREFERRED BY DIVISION CHAIRPERSONS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with identifying decision processes preferred by division chairpersons in various problem situations. A set of 30 problem situations was developed and administered to six division chairpersons in a Virginia community college. In some of the problem situations it was critical to involve subordinates in the decision process. In other problems, participation of subordinates was less critical to acceptance of the decision. Regardless of the need to share decision-making powers with subordinates, chairpersons preferred to involve them in decision processes. Findings indicated that the chairpersons preferred to use decision processes which involved subordinate participation in about 80 percent of the problem situation, 63 percent in a consultative style and 17 percent where the chairperson was willing to adopt and implement any solution that had support of the entire group.

While academic middle managers, such as department and division chairpersons, fill many different roles in higher education institutions, all are problem solvers and decision makers. As middle managers, they must deal with such varied problems as allocating financial and human resources, resolving student and faculty conflicts, and maintaining progressive and substantive academic programs. Today's academic middle managers must deal with complex problems of education quickly and effectively. They must be able to render decisions with a high degree of versatility and flexibility.

Studies concerning effective decision-making behaviors of academic managers are few and general in nature. Lombardi (1974) and Freimuth (1975) have urged that middle managers in the community college develop a competence in problem-solving and decision-making skills. Such behavioral skills will enable them to respond more effectively to difficult problems that are a part of their responsibilities.

There is evidence which supports the need for improved decision-making behaviors of division chairpersons. Wallace (1975) concluded from an exhaustive study of available literature that there were important performance problems related to the decision-making role of division chairpersons. A study of 1,098 chairpersons was conducted by Hammons and Wallace (1976). This is the most recent and comprehensive assessment of professional development needs of community college chairpersons to date. They found that one of the most pressing development needs in management for this group was in the area of problem-solving and decision-making skills. Hammons and Wallace (1976) concluded that division

chairpersons weren't effective in either managing change or making decisions.

While concern for improved decision-making behaviors of academic managers is indicated by the literature, this paper contains a report of a study of decision processes preferred by division chairpersons in various hypothetical problem situations. The study was not concerned with problem-solving strategies, where the focus is on generating alternative solutions, or decision-making strategies, where the focus is on selecting an alternative solution. More specifically, this study was concerned with identifying decision processes prescribed by division chairpersons in various problem situations and the extent to which subordinates are involved in the decision-making processes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objectives of this study were:

1. to develop a set of problem situations in an academic setting which can be used to examine preferred decision processes of academic managers.
2. to identify the preferred decision processes of division chairpersons in a community college setting.
3. to identify the extent to which problem situation attributes influence the chairpersons' willingness to share the decision process with subordinates.

METHODOLOGY

Population

The population of the study consisted of six division chairpersons employed at Central Virginia Community College ((CVCC) in

Lynchburg, Virginia during the 1977-78 academic year.

Preferred Decision-Making Process Measure

A measure of preferred decision-process behaviors was made during the study. This measure indicates a preferred process to follow and who to involve in solving problems and making decisions. The preferred decision-making processes were determined by division chairpersons who completed the set of 30 problem situations. The set of problem situations used in this study was developed by the senior author and a postdoctoral student in higher education at the University of Virginia.

The set of problem situations was patterned after a normative model developed by Vroom and Yetton (1973) while they were studying leadership and decision making in government and industry. Their decision-process normative model was based upon a paper and pencil measure of behavioral intent in hypothetical problem situations. An individual responds in accordance to a preferred decision process to solve the problem in the set as a surrogate for actual leader behavior in a real life situation.

The revised problem set developed for academic situations was examined by an expert at Kepner-Tregoe Associates, Incorporated. He agreed that these materials contained the attributes and characteristics reflected in Vroom and Yetton's problem sets.

The Normative Model

A complete description of the normative model is reported by Vroom and Yetton (1973). They viewed decision making as a social process. From their many years of study and research they have developed a normative model for determining a process to follow in

making decisions. The normative model contains five alternative processes which are available to a manager using the model in any decision-making situation. The types of management styles in the normative model include two autocratic, two consultative and one group decision process as follows:

Autocratic I- You solve the problem or make the decision yourself, using information available to you at that time.

Autocratic II- You obtain the necessary information from your subordinates, then decide on the solution to the problem yourself. You may or may not tell your subordinates what the problem is in getting information from them. The role played by your subordinates in making the decision is clearly one of providing the necessary information to you, rather than generating or evaluating alternative solutions.

Consultative I- You share the problem with relevant subordinates individually, getting their ideas and suggestions without bringing them together as a group. Then you make the decision that may or may not influence your subordinate's influence.

Consultative II- You share the problem with your subordinates as a group, collectively obtaining their ideas and suggestions. Then you make the decision that may or may not reflect your subordinates' influence.

Group II- You share a problem with your subordinates as a group. Together you generate and evaluate alternatives and attempt to reach agreement on a solution. Your role is much like that of a chairman. You don't try to influence the group to adopt your solution and you are willing to accept and implement any solution that has the support of the entire group (Vroom and Yetton, 1973, p. 13).

The normative model is based upon three classes of outcomes. These are: (1) the quality or rationality of a decision, (2) the acceptance or commitment by subordinates to implement the decision effectively, and (3) the time required to make a decision.

Since Vroom and Yetton approached decision-making processes from the perspective of problem situations, instead of leaders or decision-makers, the normative model defined seven problem attributes which must be considered in selecting a process to follow in making acceptable decisions. These problem attributes are as follows:

A. The importance of the quality of the decision.

B. The extent to which the leader possesses sufficient information/expertise to make a higher quality decision by himself.

C. The extent to which the problem is structured.

D. The extent to which acceptance or commitment on the part of subordinates is critical to the effective implementation of the decision.

E. The prior probability that the leader's autocratic decision will receive acceptance by subordinates.

F. The extent to which subordinates are motivated to attain the organizational goals as represented in the objectives explicit in the statement of the problem.

G. The extent to which subordinates are likely to be in conflict over preferred solutions (Vroom, 1973, pp. 21-30).

There are two considerations underlying the normative model. First, there are seven rules which serve to protect the quality and

acceptance of a decision by eliminating choices which place risks upon decision outcomes. Applying these rules in problem situations allows a leader to determine if and what rules have been violated. Decision processes prescribed by leaders which don't violate any rules are defined as acceptable and form a feasible set of decision processes. The second consideration for using the normative model is choosing among the acceptable decision processes within the feasible set in terms of time, and as well as organizational objectives the leader may have established for professional development of subordinates.

The seven rules include:

1. The Information Rule. If the quality of the decision is important and if the leader doesn't possess enough information or expertise to solve the problem by himself, AI is eliminated from the feasible set.
2. The Goal Congruence Rule. If the quality of the decision is important and if subordinates don't share the organizational goals to be obtained in solving the problem, GII is eliminated from the feasible set.
3. The Unstructured Problem Rule. In decisions in which the quality of the decision is important, if the leader lacks the necessary information or expertise to solve the problem alone, and if the problem is unstructured, AI, AII and CI are eliminated from the feasible set.
4. The Acceptance Rule. If the acceptance of the decision by subordinates is critical to effective implementation, and if it is not certain that an autocratic decision made by the leader would

receive that acceptance, AI and AII are eliminated from the feasible set.

5. The Conflict Rule. If the acceptance of the decision is critical, and an autocratic decision isn't certain to be accepted, and subordinates are likely to be in conflict over the appropriate solution, AI, AII, and CI are eliminated from the feasible set.
6. The Fairness Rule. If the quality of the decision is unimportant and if acceptance is critical and not certain to result from an autocratic decision, AI, AII, CI, and CII are eliminated from the feasible set.
7. The Acceptance Priority Rule. If acceptance is critical, not assured by an autocratic decision, and if subordinates can be trusted, AI, AII, CI, and CII are eliminated from the feasible set (Vroom and Yetton, 1973, pp. 32-34).

The first three rules are intended to protect quality and the last four are intended to protect acceptance of the decision.

Data Collection and Analysis

A workshop for division chairpersons at CVCC was conducted by the senior author during the Spring of 1978. The purpose of the workshop was to strengthen behaviors of chairpersons by an organized discussion and practice of problem solving, decision making and preferred decision-making processes. Prior to conducting the workshop, it was desirable to obtain selected information concerning the preferred decision-making process behaviors of the chairpersons. Therefore, the chairpersons were adminstered the 30 problem sets to obtain preferred decision-making process behaviors. All six chairpersons completed and returned this information.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the institutional specific research setting, the data were analyzed in terms of simple descriptive statistics.

FINDINGS

Preferred Decision-Process Behaviors of Division Chairpersons

The mean and percent distribution of preferred decision-process behaviors of division chairpersons were as follows:

Decision Styles	AI	AII	CI	CII	GII	
Scale	0.0	0.625	5.0	8.125	10.0	
%	6.7	12.2	30.5	33.3	17.2	$\bar{X}$= 6.03

The mean preferred decision-process behavior of division chairpersons was 6.03, between Consultative I and Consultative II decision styles. The decision processes preferred most often by the chairpersons were Consultative II (33.3%) and Consultative I (30.5%). This means that in nearly two-thirds of the problem situations the chairpersons prescribed a process to solve a problem which involved their subordinates. The consultative decision methods, CI and CII, involve sharing the problem with relevant subordinates, individually or as a group, obtaining their collective ideas and suggestions. Then the chairperson makes the decision which may or may not reflect the subordinates' influence.

The third most often preferred decision process was the GII style. In problem situations using this style the division chairperson shares the problem with subordinates as a group. Together they generate and evaluate alternatives and attempt to reach agreement on a solution. The chairperson's role is not to try to influence the group to adopt

his solution. He should be willing to accept and implement any solution which has the support of the entire group.

Interestingly enough, the decision processes preferred least often by the chairpersons were the autocratic styles, AI and AII. In these situations the chairperson either (1) solves the problem alone or (2) obtains information from subordinates with or without telling them what the problem is and then deciding the solution to the problem by himself.

Acceptable Reponses and Rule Violations

Seven rules were defined earlier under the section on methodology. These rules are used to determine whether decision processes preferred by chairpersons were acceptable or unacceptable. Three rules serve to protect the quality of a decision and four to protect acceptance. For each rule a set of conditions is defined, the problem status is specified in terms of the seven problem attributes which then contradict one or more of the five decision process styles.

Of the 180 decision processes preferred by the chairpersons, 75, or 42 percent, were unacceptable and 105, or 58 percent, were acceptable. It should be noted, however, that of the 75 unacceptable responses 23 rule violations were made by one chairperson. The frequency of rule violations are distributed as follows:

Rule	Violations	Rank Order
1. Information	8	4.5
2. Goal Congruence	6	7
3. Unstructured Situation	15	2
4. Commitment	7	6
5. Conflict	14	3
6. Fairness	8	4.5
7. Commitment Priority	17	1
	Total 75	

The first three rules protect the quality of a decision outcome and rules four through seven protect acceptance of decision outcomes. As indicated above, the chairpersons violated the commitment priority rule most often, followed by the unstructured situation rule and conflict rule. These findings indicate that the chairpersons violated rules which protect the acceptance of decision outcomes more often than rules to protect the quality of a decision outcome.

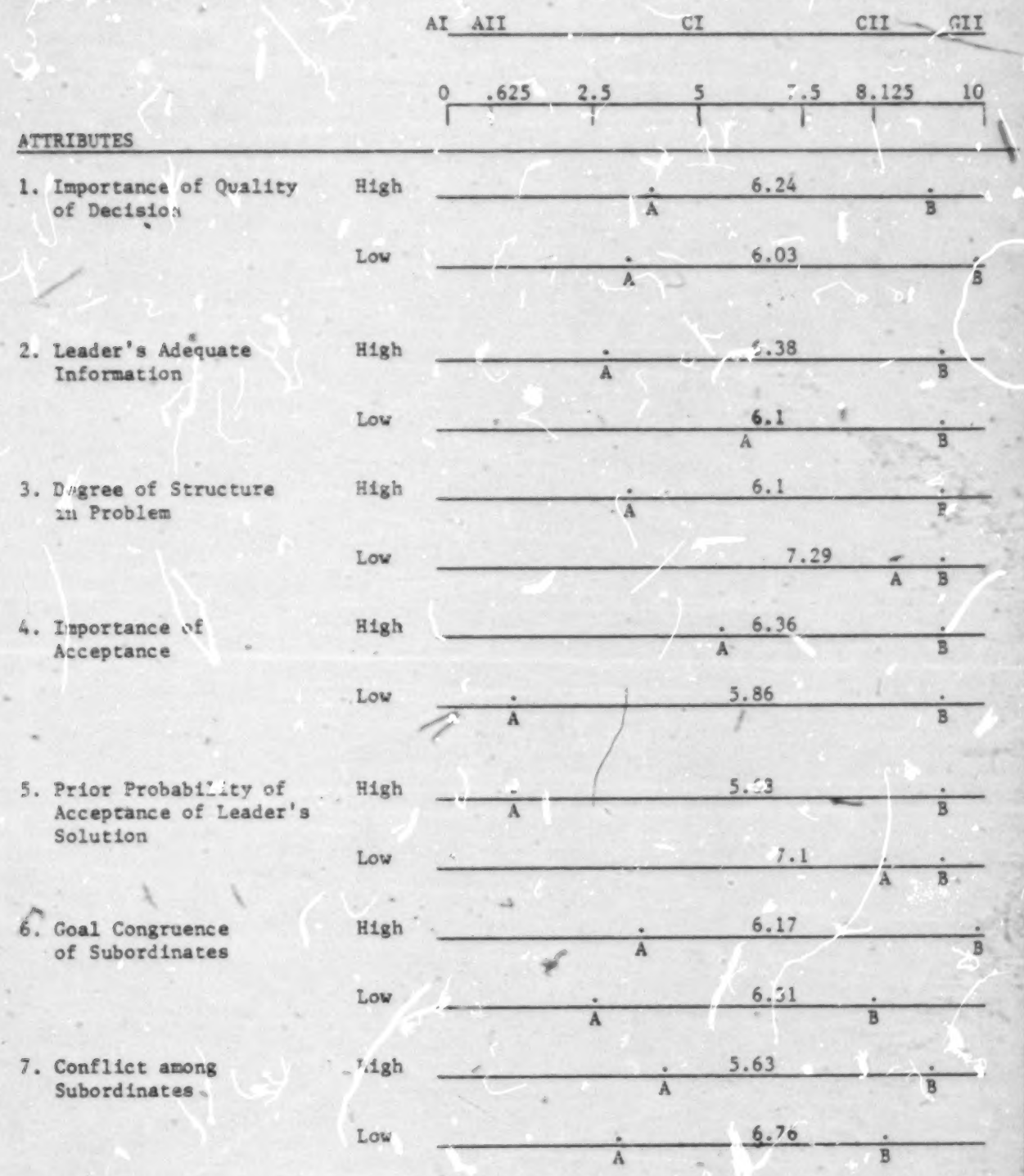
Effects of problem attributes on decision processes preferred by chairpersons

Acceptable decision processes varied from one problem situation to another. This was due to differences in problem attributes and the seven rules prescribed for an acceptable decision process. It is possible to examine the effects of problem attributes on the decision processes preferred by the chairpersons. Figure 1 indicates the extent to which each of these problem attributes influenced the preferred decision behaviors of the six chairpersons.

The 30 problem situations were constructed with the seven problem attributes written into them in a predetermined manner. Within this context, in some of the problem situations it is very important to prefer a decision process which involves subordinate participation because it is critical to acceptance and commitment to implement the decision by subordinates. These problem situations are categorized for each attribute and labelled high.

In other problem situations it wasn't important to involve subordinate participation in selecting a decision process. In these cases acceptance and commitment by subordinates to the decision process

Figure 1. Effects of Problem Attributes on Chairpersons' Willingness to Encourage Subordinate Participation in Decision Processes, Central Virginia Community College, Spring 1978



was less critical for implementation of the decision to solve a problem. Those problem situations were categorized by problem attribute and are labelled low in Figure 1.

In Figure 1 are listed the seven problem attributes. Beside each problem attribute are two scales, one for problem situations where subordinate participation was very important and labelled high, and a second line, low, where problem situations were categorized in which subordinate participation was not as important to acceptance and commitment to implement a decision. Also listed on each line is the mean score of the division chairpersons. The mean score of model A and model B are listed on each line in order to provide comparisons between the chairpersons preferred decision behavior and the behavior suggested by the normative model. Model A is a less participative decision style because the criterion for selecting the decision process is time. Model B prescribes more subordinate participation and is always to the right of Model A.

The chairpersons selected decision processes which encouraged subordinate participation where considered desirable in relation to the following problem attributes: importance of quality of the decision, leader had adequate information, degree of structure in problem, importance of acceptance, and goal congruence of subordinates. See the high line for each of these attributes.

There were two attributes, prior probability of acceptance of leaders' solution and conflict among subordinates, in which participation of subordinates was critical to acceptance and commitment to the decision. However, the chairpersons tended to select processes

discouraging subordinate participation. See the high lines for these two attributes. In problem situations where subordinate participation was less than critical to acceptance and commitment to implement the decision solution, the chairpersons continued to prefer decision-process behaviors where subordinate participation was encouraged in the decision process. See the low lines for importance of quality of decision, leader's adequate information, degree of structure in problem, prior probability of acceptance of leader's solution, goal congruence of subordinates and conflict among subordinates. Several times the low participation mean scores were higher than the high mean participation scores.

CONCLUSIONS

There are two conclusions which can be made from the findings of this study. First, a set of problem situations can be developed and used to identify decision-process behaviors of division chairpersons in a community college. Secondly, these division chairpersons prefer decision processes which involve subordinate participation in most problem situations.

It was interesting to note that the division chairpersons preferred decision processes which involved subordinate participation regardless of the problem attributes. The chairpersons encouraged subordinate participation in hypothetical problem situations where their involvement wasn't critical to get acceptance for the decision. The indicative behavior of chairpersons to communicate and share their power of decision-making with subordinates reflect a participative and consultative group style of governance and management structure.

In this study the issue of decision processes was addressed.

There are other important aspects which influence decision-process behaviors but were not included. One of these aspects which should be identified in future studies is the management system and structure of the college organization. Participative management systems which encourage group decision processes help to manage personal conflicts, increase productivity and create positive attitudes within an organization (Likert and Likert, 1976). Since this research was exploratory in nature and the research setting was institutionally specific, this study could be extended to included considerations for management systems used in a college in relation to managerial decision styles of academic managers.

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